



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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As Snowmobile Season Approaches, Environmental Police Urge Attention to Safety

BOSTON – With the first snow of the season blanketing the ground, the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) today urged Bay State snowmobilers to learn and obey state laws relating to their sport before hitting the trails.

“Winter is at our doorstep, and it’s only a matter of time before we get a major snowfall that will send snowmobilers out into woods and fields from the Berkshires to the South Shore,” said James Hanlon, director of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs’ Division of Law Enforcement. “As the state agency charged with investigating off-road vehicle accidents, the Environmental Police will be patrolling snowmobile trails throughout the winter, apprehending snowmobilers who threaten the safety of the sport for the majority of law-abiding operators.”

Twenty snowmobile accidents were reported in Massachusetts last winter – with three fatalities. According to the MEP, 13,367 snowmobiles were registered in the Commonwealth as of October 30, and a snowy winter would likely push that number higher.

Massachusetts law prohibits snowmobilers from operating under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and at “unreasonable, improper and unsafe speed for existing conditions.” The majority of last winter’s accidents, and two of the three fatalities, involved alcohol and excessive speed, according to the MEP.

It is also illegal to operate a snowmobile on public ways (including plowed snow banks adjacent to public ways); on private land without permission of the landowners; within 150 feet of a residence without permission of the owner; and on any public land without minimum snow cover of four inches.

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Snowmobilers are required to wear an approved helmet, and those under age 14 are generally prohibited from operating a snowmobile unless they are directly supervised by someone 18 years or older (children aged 10 or 11 may only operate under supervision on land where they live, and no one under age 10 may drive a snowmobile under any circumstances).

Snowmobile operators are also prohibited from harassing or chasing wildlife or domestic animals, and from carrying firearms in or on snowmobiles or attached trailers or sleds unless they are enclosed in a case and unloaded.

Massachusetts law requires snowmobilers to observe trail etiquette by keeping to the right side of trails and slowing down to yield to passing skiers, hikers, equestrians and other non-motorized trail users. All snowmobiles operated on public or private property must be registered with the MEP, unless used solely on land owned by the operator. When driving a snowmobile on private property without written consent, operators must display a valid Snowmobile Association Trail Permit from the Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts (SAM), a statewide 9,000-member organization.

SAM also provides information on designated snowmobile areas and trails around Massachusetts (www.sledmass.com). In addition, snowmobiles are permitted at numerous Department of Conservation and Recreation properties (www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/snowmobileUse.htm). The Department of Fish and Game does not permit snowmobiling at its Wildlife Sanctuaries and Wildlife Management Areas, however.

For the complete law relating to snowmobile use, see Massachusetts General Law Chapter 90B (<http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/gl-90b-toc.htm>), Sections 20-35. Violations of snowmobile, recreational vehicle, environmental and wildlife laws should be reported to the MEP at 1-800-632-8075.

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